SØREN KIERKEGAARD AND HIS SISTER-IN-LAW HENRIETTE KIERKEGAARD

A PRESENTATION COPY

BY

JOSIAH THOMPSON

I. The Persons

Only a single photograph (see page 103) of Henriette Kierkegaard has come down to us. She sits in a chair, lips pursed, arms folded, her hair parted in the middle and drawn back under a tightly bowed white bonnet. Looking at this photo we can appreciate a contemporary's description of her as "really pretty, with something delicate and fine—almost too fine—in her appearance, and a charming feminine softness in her being." [1]) Yet somewhere in the folds of her dress, in the bend of her shoulders, in the hollows of her cheeks one detects a weakness and a fragility which is more than "feminine softness". She is, one feels, not a strong woman.

We know very little of her early life. Born in 1809, the eldest daughter of Pastor Poul Egede Glahn, she grew up in the midst of the Grundtvig circle. Grundtvig was a close friend of both her parents, and in 1820 even undertook to give her instruction in Bible history and catechism. "In addition it is for me a real joy to read with your Jette," he wrote to her parents in December 1820, "her attention, thoughtfulness, familiarity with faith's firm basis, and love of truth is very precious to me." [2]) The association with Grundtvig endured for many years. In 1837 he composed a poem to Jette and her sister Marie, and four years later (on June 12, 1841) wrote another piece in celebration of her marriage to Peter Christian Kierkegaard.[3]) It was through this marriage that she first came into contact with Søren Kierkegaard.

Et besøg på Det kongelige Biblioteks Kierkegaard-udstilling 1963 fik en amerikansk Kierkegaard-forsker til at overvinde sine betænkeligheder ved at erhverve en bibliofil sjældenhed. Herom og om de personlige momenter der spiller ind i bogens ældste historie handler artiklen, hvoraf et dansk résumé findes nedenfor s. 162–64.

Where Jette and Søren first made their acquaintance is not known. It would have been strange indeed if Søren had not attended his brother's wedding (he was living in Copenhagen at the time, laboring to finish his dissertation on irony while at the same time attempting to disentangle himself from Regine), and we can assume that it was there they first met. In any case we know that in the months which followed the wedding the three of them—Jette, Peter, and Søren—lived together in the Kierkegaard family home on Nytorv. This was a difficult time for both Jette and Søren. She was abed much of the time during the late summer of that year (her only child would be born the following spring), and his affair with Regine was moving then towards its lacerating conclusion. What they talked about that summer—whether Søren ever confided in Jette, whether he ever remarked to her on the irony of the three of them living together, he who at that very time was giving up marriage forever and the two of them who were just beginning it—all that must remain a secret. For Søren's journal entries of that time are extremely abbreviated, and nothing written by Jette has come down to us. Our only description of that time comes from the reminiscences of Henriette Lund, Søren's niece. Although only a child at the time, she was able much later to provide us with this extraordinarily vivid account of a visit she made to the old home:

"One day in the autumn there came an invitation, shortly after we had moved back from our summer residence into town, to visit Uncle Søren at the old house in Nytorv where he was living with Uncle Peter, who had recently been married to Henriette Glahn. I did not know then that Uncle Søren had broken his engagement. . . . . When we children from Gammel Torv and Købmagergade, who had received Uncle Søren's invitation, arrived at Nytorv, Aunt Henriette received us with great friendliness, happy that we (as she thought) had thought of visiting her in this way. But she was soon disillusioned when Uncle Søren arrived almost at the same moment to take us to his room. He looked terribly upset; and instead of his usual teasing, he kissed me so gently on my hair, that I was quite touched to the heart. A moment afterwards, when he was waiting to talk to us, he burst instead into violent weeping, and, without really knowing what there was to weep over—at least that was so in my case—we were soon all sobbing with him, gripped by his grief, as though under the weight of a deep sorrow."[4])

Given the weight of this "deep sorrow" it is unlikely that Søren had much inclination during this period to strike up a relationship with his sister-in-law. We can imagine them passing on the stairs, exchanging

Henriette Kierkegaard, née Glahn. Photo from the 1870's. (Full size.)

pleasantries, Søren only half-concealing his distraction and Jette turning away in embarrassment. It was probably, then, with a certain sense of relief that Jette learned that Søren had left for Berlin on October 25th, and that the family home was now hers and Peter's.

By the time Søren returned from Berlin on March 6, 1842 Jette's pregnancy was almost at an end. Three weeks later, on March 27th, young Poul Kierkegaard was born, and Søren for the first time had a nephew who would bear the Kierkegaard name. During the years which followed he always seemed to have a special affection for young Poul. Few were his letters to Peter during this time which failed to contain some mention of his young nephew. "I especially long to see Poul." he wrote to Peter on May 16, 1844, "My position in life as an uncle is to me a cherished appointment, and I am also used to being very popular with my nephews. Greet him for me, and let him not remain completely ignorant of the fact that an Uncle Søren exists. When I first am able to engage him personally in conversation, then I hope our acquaintanceship will make rapid progress." [5]) Not a little of this affection for Poul may have been due to a short period of intimacy which uncle and

nephew shared in the autumn of 1842. For in September of that year Peter was appointed priest for the parish of Pedersborg and Kindertofte near Sorø in Zealand. During November and December he lived in Sorø, making arrangements for his family, while Jette and Poul lived alone with Søren at Nytorv. The image of the author of "Either/Or" cradling a six-months old infant in his arms may offend our sensibilities, but there seems to be nothing in the record to indicate its impossibility. Perhaps Judge William's description of his homelife, of how he returns from work to the beautiful tones of his wife's lullaby, how he enters to "hear the cry of the little one", which to his ear "is not inharmonious",[6]) owes its origin to these fading months of 1842.

With the coming of the New Year, Jette and little Poul rejoined Peter in Sorø, and Søren was left alone in Copenhagen. During the following years a fairly regular correspondence was kept up by Søren and Peter, a correspondence first published in "Tilskueren" (1889 and 1900), and later analyzed in Carl Weltzer's book "Peter og Søren Kierkegaard" (1936). The affairs of the church, the disposition of the family estate, their differences on theological questions: this was the substance of the exchange of letters between the two brothers. Yet this was not the only line of communication which Søren kept open to Sorø, for preserved in the Royal Library are four long letters he wrote to Jette during the years 1844-47. Oriented in a direction away from practical affairs, sometimes playful and witty and at other times deeply serious, these letters offer a glance at a Kierkegaardian *persona* not generally known. The first letter—written in 1844—reads as follows:[7])

Dear Sister-in Law,

In one of Scribe's most admirable pieces there appears, as you may remember, a character called Charles (a doubtful genius, but an infinitely comic figure) who with great pathos exclaims when his debts have been paid by his uncle: "I said immediately to myself, said I, either one has an uncle or one has no uncle." These words I wish to offer as the basis for my observations. If you, dear Jette, are to be the observer you will probably think as follows: Either one has a brother-in-law or one has no brother-in-law, but if one has a brother-in-law, why does one never see him? In that, you are completely right, and your case is, *sans comparaison*, far more difficult than Charles' with respect to drawing a conclusion. Were I to offer an observation, I would think like this: Either one has a sister-in-law or one has no sister-in-law; but what is the sense of having a sister-in-law one never sees? In this I too

am quite correct, and yet my case is far simpler than yours, for in a letter which Peter showed me I saw a greeting and an invitation for me, and it was actually the sight of those lines which made me pronounce such remarkable words.

Now, this is very curious. When you were in Copenhagen we did not meet very often, I confess, but sometimes I did receive a note from you. And with respect to these notes the fact is that actually they became shorter and shorter, and yet this was not a sign that you were becoming cooler and cooler towards me; on the contrary, it was a sign that you were gaining more confidence in me. In the same way, may the fact that since those days I have heard nothing from you be a sign that the thought of your having a brother-in-law, far from becoming more and more strange, has become more natural to you. Frankly, that has been my experience with regard to having a sister-in-law. When you were in Copenhagen it would have been so easy to visit you. If it occurred to me and I did not do it, the next moment became disagreeable to me, and I had to dismiss the thought quickly. But now deterred (in a sense) by the distance, it is quite in order that my thoughts sometimes dwell on you, especially when I go for my lonely walks where the charms of rural life make the deepest impression on me. Finally this, too, caused a new difficulty, and it is and was a motto for my life—as so often happened to me in childhood—that I did not get permission from my father to go to Frederiksberg, but hand in hand we walked the floor—to Frederiksberg.

This is approximately what has occurred to me to write to you. Even if I do not have the precipitateness (Skyndsomhed) to come, I still possess perspicacity (Skjønsomhed) while staying away. With perspicacity I receive every piece of information from you, every greeting, every invitation; with perspicacity I ponder the fact that the two of us agree that the name *Kierkegaard* shall not so soon die out, even if our labors are very different, ah!, I admit it, yours far more certain than mine.

This letter makes no demands, least of all does it demand an answer.

My regards to Peter and Poul (there is a harbor somewhere in Europe called Peter and Poul's Harbor, it might also be called Pedersborg) and also to you, and above all use the summer to recuperate. If you were happy to be able to go to meet Peter in Roeskilde, you may rest assured that I was very happy indeed that you were able to do so.

Yours,

S. Kierkegaard

Here, we must admit, is a Kierkegaardian *persona* which is neither new nor particularly attractive. For here is the self-conscious literary artist using even a letter to his sister-in-law as an opportunity to exhibit his wit and literary skill. The idea of the letter is a simple one—they have not seen each other in awhile and Søren wants to assure her of his continuing regard. Yet this simple idea suffices as a skeleton for four paragraphs of the most convoluted prose, topped off by an elaborate pun on the similarity between *Skyndsomhed* and *Skjønsomhed.* Behind almost every line of this letter we can detect Kierkegaard peering over his own shoulder, complimenting himself on the ease with which he sustains a playful line of patter. And what of Jette and his declared regard for her? Let us hope that she was amused by the attentions of a brother-in-law who even now was accumulating a literary reputation in keeping with the verbal antics of his letter to her.

The invitation mentioned in the letter remained unaccepted for a full year. It was not until June 7, 1845 that Søren put his work to the side, engaged a coach, and traveled west the forty-seven miles to Sorø. No record of this visit has come down to us, but if Søren's subsequent behavior is any guide, then it must have been a pleasant one. For his visit was not an isolated one, but was repeated often in the years which followed. From Coachman Lassen's receipt book [8]) we know that he returned twice to Sorø in 1846 (in April and October), and three times in 1847 (in April, June, and October). Usually these visits would last three days—enough time for Søren to renew his acquaintance with young Poul, to indulge his penchant for walking in the countryside, and also, perhaps, sufficient time for him to participate vicariously in the life of his brother's family without it becoming wearing. This journal entry from 1846 undoubtedly refers to a visit to Sorø: "It's so pleasing to make a visit in the country when one is of an age that host and hostess only desire that one walk and shift for oneself, and merely pay attention that one doesn't come to harm." [9])

Even on a visit to the country, it would seem, Søren guarded preciously that solitude he so prized. Yet it was not all solitude and meditation; there was also time for wit and laughter—witness Henriette Lund's description of a visit Søren made to Sorø in June of 1847: "Some time after my confirmation, my girl cousin and I were invited to visit Pedersborg Rectory, where Uncle Peter was then priest... The first Saturday after our arrival, a mail coach rolled into the courtyard with a lonely passenger. It soon appeared that the lonely one was Uncle Søren. What a flutter arose in the dovecots! Sunday morning broke with

cloudless skies; so the lunch table was set out in the open on one of the hillocks in the garden, and I remember still with what vivacity Uncle Søren led the conversation, and how many amusing stories he told for our benefit. But in the evening when we settled ourselves on the grass by the little Pedersborg lake, his brilliant jollity was broken as with one stroke. In deep silence he merely gazed dreamily forward; and only when the moon, like a half-effaced death mask, looked down on us from the faint-hued June sky, did he break the silence again, by greeting the moon in subdued and moving tones with Aladdin's words:

'O pale moon!
Thou that dividest the seasons here on earth,
Why art so stingy thou towards me, thou cold,
Thou sallow miser? Why art thou so mean?'

The next day saw him on his homeward way again, in spite of all our entreaties. He would never allow himself a long holiday." [10])

These visits to Sorø were a necessary and welcome diversion for Søren —a chance to break off for a few days the furious pace of his literary activity in favor of a brief participation in a life which was at once simpler and less strenuous than the life he led in Copenhagen. But it would have been strange indeed if his identity as a promising author never became a topic of conversation at Sorø, and hence we should not be too surprised to learn that on at least two occasions he sent copies of his work to Sorø. On 19 March 1846 he sent to Peter a copy of "Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift" ("Concluding Unscientific Postscript"), and a year later honored Jette's request by sending her an especially elegant copy of what (in all probability) was his latest published work, "Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand" ("Edifying Discourses in Various Spirits"). Accompanying the book he sent the following letter: [11])

Dear Jette,

I am delighted that you yourself have given me the opportunity of sending the accompanying book. The responsibility is then your own, and I trust you will be all the more careful to make sure that something for which I would be sorry will not occur—namely that your reading the book or some part of it should clash with my brother's idea of what is beneficial or harmful reading.

It is my own copy, originally meant for myself: it has therefore a purely personal relation to me not in my capacity of author, as is the

case with the other copies, but rather as if the author had made me a present of it. However, it seems to me now that it has failed its destiny and will fulfill its true destiny only in being destined for you—the only suitable copy of the whole edition. From the bookbinder's hand (and in judging bookbinding I am quite impartial, I suppose) it is attractively got up. It has been perused by me and may thus be called a copy which has been read. Well, now everything is in order. For a moment you may admire the bookbinder's skill, as you would admire any other object of art; after that you may—for a somewhat longer moment, if you like—take pleasure in the fact that it is a gift; after that you may lay the book aside (—for it has been read), keep it as one keeps a gift, keep it carefully—if it is a cherished gift.

But enough of this. I was sorry that I could not say goodbye to you; I hope that this little note by means of which I say goodbye will find you as well as I found you on my arrival. *Do not on any account cease to take pleasure in walking: I walk every day to preserve my well-being and walk away from every sickness; I have walked my best thoughts into existence, and I know of no thought so heavy that one cannot walk away from it.* Even if one so pursued one's health that it always remained one step ahead—*I would still say: walk!* It is quite obvious that by walking one always gets as close as possible to good health, even if one never completely attains it —*but by sitting still, and the longer one sits still, the nearer will ill-health draw.* Only in the motion of exercise are health and salvation to be found. If anyone denies that motion exists, then I do like Diogenes: I walk. If anyone denies that health is to be found in motion, then I walk away from all morbid objections. *Thus if you go on walking, all will go well enough.* And in the country you have all the advantages; you are not liable to be stopped even before you have safely emerged from the gateway, nor are you exposed to being intercepted on your way home. I recall exactly what happened to me some time ago, and what has indeed happened to me several times. I had been walking for an hour and a half, had done a good deal of thinking, and thanks to the motion I had grown agreeably relaxed. What happiness, and as you may imagine, what care I took to bring my happiness safely home, if possible. Thus I hurry along; with downcast eyes I steal, so to speak, through the streets. Confident of having the right of way I count on there being no need for looking up (how easily one is caught just when looking up—in order to escape), and thus hurrying along with my bliss on the sidewalk (for the prohibition against carrying anything on the sidewalk does not apply to blisses, which lighten one's burden) I run directly into a

man who is always suffering from ill-health and who therefore walks with downcast eyes and, spiteful because of his ill-health, thinks that he need not look up even when he does not have the right of way. I was stopped. It was a distinguished gentleman who now honored me with a conversation. Thus everything was lost. The conversation finished there was only one thing for me to do: instead of walking home to walk again.

There is as you may see for yourself no space left in this letter, and so I break off this conversation—for it has indeed been a conversation insofar as I have continually thought of you as being here. Take care of yourself!

Yours,

S. Kierkegaard

The book described at such length in this letter is, I believe, pictured on page 115. It is an elegant copy indeed—as the second part of this essay will indicate—and its very elegance shows something of the growing warmth of Søren's feelings for Jette. This warmth is also apparent in the tone of the letter itself, which, although not without wit and style, is nevertheless much more direct in statement and mood than its earlier counterpart. In this letter Søren is speaking directly to Jette, and we detect in it a genuine concern for her health and well-being. Indeed, it is the question of her health which stands at the center of both this letter and the two which followed later in the year.

The precise nature of Jette's illness is not easily determined. Carl Weltzer speculates that it may have been tuberculosis of the hip, or perhaps arthritis,[12]) but this must remain little more than a guess. In a letter to Peter from the year 1843 Søren speaks of her as "neurasthenic",[13]) and this judgement is probably closer to the truth. Even if her illness had an organic basis, it was nevertheless exacerbated by a nervous disposition which was in evidence even before her marriage to Peter. "Jette Kierkegaard shall turn out to be just as weak as Jette Glahn," remarked a relative of hers shortly after her marriage in 1841, "she lies in bed all day with a headache."[14]) As her marriage proceeded and as Peter became more and more occupied with the affairs of the church and with his parish, Jette became even "weaker"—withdrawing ever deeper into her sickroom. During the first five years of her marriage she made at least one visit to a sanitarium in Roskilde (cf. Søren's first letter to her), and stayed in bed an ever increasing proportion of the time. Finally, in the summer of 1847, to all intents and purposes she became an invalid, taking to her bed where she stayed for the remaining 34 years of her life.

It is no wonder then that Søren's three letters from 1847 concern themselves with Jette's health, for at just this time she was taking a crucial turn for the worse. His next letter to her, written probably in September 1847, makes evident this change: [15])

Dear Jette,

Having seen and talked with my brother several times during the last few days I have come to think quite vividly about you. However, lest I appear worse than I really am, let me say that in the long time that has passed since I last saw you or heard anything from you I have not neglected to think about you. But you know how it is; when one has not seen the beginning of a sequence of events one finds it difficult to become part and parcel of it at some later time; one prefers to wait for another sequence to start, so that one may utilize the moment to get in at the beginning. It is, or at least it is so with me, with respect to the events of life, the sad as well as the happy ones—if I do not happen to take part from the outset I prefer to sit things out in order to begin at the beginning next time.

What I want to speak about now goes far back in time. You had already been sick for a long time when I first heard of it. The fact that I could not begin at the beginning had the effect that I did not begin at all. Time passed, on several occasions I planned to write to you, but always this objection presented itself and stopped me: now it is too late, where shall I begin? And so time passed. "Sunday came and Sunday went, but no boots for Hans were sent". At last I got completely out of the habit, that is, I got into the habit of finding the difficulty of beginning insurmountable. — Ah!, and perhaps it has been the same with you. At first you may have thought now and then: How strange that I hear nothing at all from him; he ought to be ashamed of himself; but now it is too late, now he may just as well save himself the trouble.

Then my brother arrived in town; for me there was a new turn, a turning-point: here is a letter for you; what you get out of it will of course depend upon how you receive it; what you find in it will of course depend upon how you read it—yet I do not think it at all necessary to be practised in the art of reading between the lines in order to recognize the sympathy expressed in it.

Peter told me that you are still sick in bed. Time's heavy burden I can quite vividly imagine, although I myself have not been tried thus. The burden is in part also that which I once have talked to you about, that it is next to impossible to avoid being misunderstood by people

when one suffers in such a way. "It is not fever, nor is it having broken an arm, nor at all having had a fall and injured oneself—what is it then?" This is the impatient question of the doctor and of common humane sympathy—ah, and when one suffers in such a way it is just a question of patience, patience in not losing heart, patience in bearing with the impatience of sympathy. But after all we mortals and our sympathy are like that. And when one suffers as you are suffering, although there may be, as I am sure there is by your side, one human being who loyally endures bearing the yoke together with you—still one will have to realize that only the God of Patience is able wholeheartedly to go on caring about a human being with the same eternally unchanged sympathy. How moving are the words of an old hymn: "if every hour I wept and had to wonder," namely from where help and relief are to come—how moving is the answer the poet himself gives: "God still lives". And He is every day, at all hours of the day, early in the morning, in a sleepless hour of the night, at the time of day when one is weakest—He is unchanged the same.

Dear Jette, when I have thus got pen in hand I might easily go on writing page after page; to me it would be a pleasure to do so, to you it might not be unpleasant to read it. But at the moment I have to break off, and a letter like this may always be continued the next day.

Goodbye—for to me it is as if I had been talking to you; goodbye. Remember me to Poul; do tell him once in a while something about me, so that he does not grow up in complete ignorance of the fact that he has an uncle. I have asked Peter especially to remember me to you; now please remember me to Peter.

Yours,
S. K.

Søren's remarks here concerning other persons' misunderstanding of Jette's illness only serve to buttress the suggestion made earlier that this illness may not have had a purely organic cause. He seems quite able to appreciate her predicament, and offers her what consolation he can. In his next letter, written just after Christmas 1847, he renews this effort at consolation: [16])

Dear Jette,

Thanks for the short letter which, as you write, should reach me before Christmas. I hasten to answer it so that you may get my reply before New Year.

The time between Christmas and New Year is for me generally a very

convenient time for receiving letters, and a lucky time of year for the letter-writer in question if, that is, he regards it as a bit of luck to receive an answer from me.

Now, you are again confined to your bed. However, it was indeed a healthy and fresh, not in the least a morbid decision of yours, thus without further ado to write to me, although you have heard nothing from me for such a long time. Well, this is a good sign, and I am delighted. "At the same time last year you wrote a letter for me, but it was not sent." Well, perhaps you were not ill in bed at the time, and yet your condition was possibly rather that of someone confined to her bed.

Therefore I am delighted also on your behalf to have received this letter from you, as a sign of health. Preserve your health, build it up during the coming year which I hope God will make a happy year for you. There is something which is closely bound up with physical sickness, this quiet, intensely painful and slowly wasting anxiety, which now turns over in suffering on one side thinking that it has been forgotten by others—"who probably never think about one''—now turns over on the other side, afraid that what one has to say or to write may not be good enough. O, chase away that anxiety which is especially dangerous to you because you so often are sick in bed and continually living in monotonous quiet. He who is busy in life will soon forget such thoughts; but he who sees very little change around him, to him anxiety may easily become almost a necessity. When one lives in small rooms—you know it well enough—they must be aired very often; and in the same way, when one is occupied with few thoughts and has little diversion it is extremely important that what one breathes in, in a spiritual sense, must be good and beneficial and mild and calming thoughts.

You also need recreation, but it is not so easy to procure recreation in monotony. And yet it is perhaps easier than one thinks, if one but will. It is generally believed, I suppose, that what determines the direction of one's thoughts is to be found in the physical world, is what is more or less likely to happen. But that is not the case. What determines the direction of one's thoughts is chiefly to be found in one's own mind. He who has a penchant towards melancholy, for example, to him unfortunate events will always appear most probable. Why? Because melancholy is part of his nature. In a given case there was just as great, perhaps greater, probability to the contrary; but he breaks off arbitrarily, has immediately sufficient grounds for deciding that something unfortunate will happen to him.

But what does it mean to "believe"? To believe is continually to expect the

happy, the fortunate, the good. But is not that an extraordinary and a blissful recreation! O, what more is needed! It may seem almost a pleasantry what I will now say, and yet I am quite serious and tell you in all sincerity: You are almost always suffering—this is then your task: Divert your *mind, get into the habit of transforming suffering into the expectation of happiness, by believing. It is REALLY possible.* What is needed is that flexibility in one's innermost mind which after every failure immediately begins again, saying: Yes, yes; next time it will be all right. O, even if one never saw any other human being—and that is far from being your case—one may through belief conjure up a world of recreation in or into the loneliest room.

As a rule it is probably the right thing to caution against self-love; yet I regard it as *my duty to say to every sufferer* with whom I associate, *take care that you love yourself.* When one is ill and cannot do much for others, the melancholy thought will easily come into one's mind that one is, so to speak, superfluous in this world—and now and then other people may intimate as much. Remember then *that to God every human being is equally important, absolutely equally important.* Indeed, were there a difference, he who suffers most must be the nearest object of God's concern. And here too may be found an infinite divine recreation. But I must break off. I can truthfully say: I lack space. Take care of yourself, dear Jette; Happy New Year; thanks for ending the old year so beautifully by thinking of me. Remember me to Peter and Poul.

Your devoted S. K.

Of all the letters which Søren wrote to Jette this is perhaps the warmest, the most genuinely human. Yet even here one feels that Søren speaks to his sister-in-law only through the mask of a *persona*; that here as elsewhere he is writing (as it were) "pseudonymously". Where earlier he had employed the pseudonym of the bright young author joyfully exhibiting his literary skill, here his voice takes on the equally stylized tones of a pastor consoling the sick. If his first letter reminded us of the "aesthete A", of "Constantine Constantius", or of "Quidam", the later one reminds us of the solemn, gentler tones of that other pseudonym—the "Søren Kierkegaard" who penned the "edifying discourses". In both cases the "real" Søren Kierkegaard stands somewhere behind, content as always to reveal himself only through a multiplicity of styles and roles, seeking even in his familial relations to remain hidden, withdrawn, mysterious.

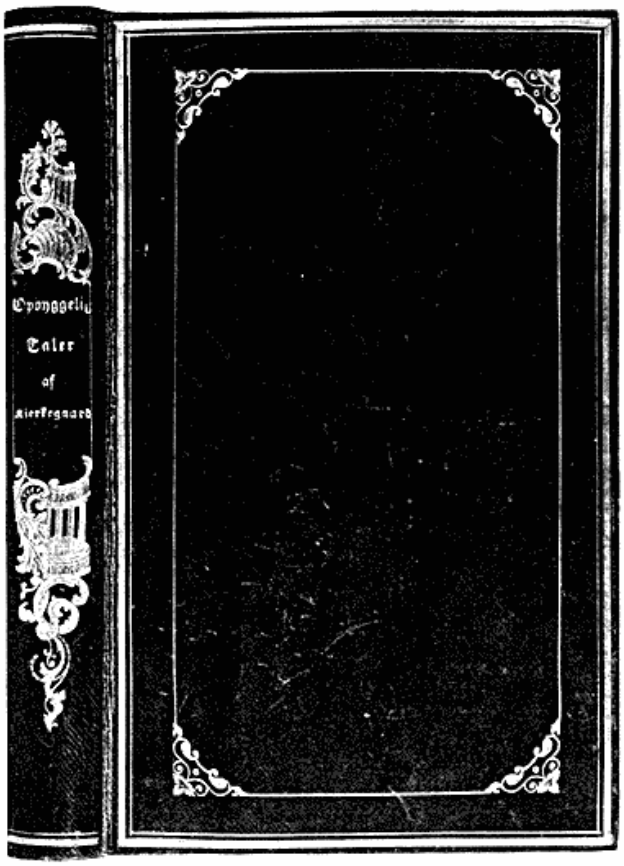
And what was to be the end of this story? Like most stories carved

from real life it seems to lack both an ending and a climax. We know that Søren made two more visits to Sorø,[17]) in June of 1849 and in June of 1850. While no description of either visit has survived, it seems most unlikely that the relation between Søren and Jette reached any greater fruition than that demonstrated in his last letter to her. For during the late 1840's and early 1850's theological questions drove the two brothers farther apart, and under the circumstances it seems unlikely that any correspondence between Søren and Jette was kept up. He died in November, 1855, refusing even on his deathbed to speak with Peter. Jette survived her brother-in-law by twenty-six years. Remaining a bed-ridden invalid to the very end, she lived long enough to see her son, Poul, committed to a mental institution for a short time, and to see her husband's declining years darkened by a similar mental illness. She died not peacefully on June 1st, 1881 at the age of 72.

II. The Book

At first I thought I was being taken in. For here was I—an American student—being offered at a reasonable price a presentation copy of one of Søren Kierkegaard's own works. As I turned the book in my hands, as I felt the paper and admired the black Saffian binding, it seemed to me more and more unlikely that the book was really what the seller pretended it to be. First, there was no dedication on the flyleaf. Could this really be a presentation copy and yet lack a dedication? My Danish was not good enough to decipher the seller's explanation of this fact. Then too there was the rather miraculous condition of both paper and binding. Could this book really have been bound over 100 years ago by Kierkegaard's own bookbinder? I looked at the gold glinting on the black Saffian and suddenly made up my mind. This was a genuine first edition all right, but the binding must be new; otherwise the book would surely be in either private hands or in the safe-keeping of the Royal Library. I was being taken in—taken for a "sucker", in the modern idiom. Thus not without a few words of silent self-congratulation I declined to buy the book and left.

It was two months later that an exhibit marking the 150th Anniversary of Kierkegaard's birth went up in the Royal Library. Here were a number of personal copies of his works, as well as a selection of manuscripts and several presentation copies. These latter copies I examined with great interest. "Yes," I said to myself, "See how all these copies are bound simply in *sort glanspapir*, all with a dedication on the flyleaf.



Søren Kierkegaard's personal copy of „Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand" (1847). (Reduced.)

That must have been a fake you were shown several months ago, since none of these presentation copies is bound so elegantly." With a chuckle I moved on to some of the other exhibits. I looked at the famous *pragtexemplar* of the "Efterskrift" owned by the Royal Library. This had been Kierkegaard's personal copy of his greatest philosophical work, and had most probably enjoyed a place in the renowned Rosewood cabinet. As I looked at this beautiful copy, something stirred on the edges of my memory. Then I had it. For inside both front and back covers of the "Efterskrift" was the same white satin I had seen earlier on the book offered to me for sale. Then as I looked closer at the book in the display case, other similarities became apparent. There was the similarity of the layout of the title on the spines of both volumes: *Afsluttende Efterskrift af J. Climacus* and earlier *Opbyggelig Taler af Kierkegaard.*

Although the stampings on the bindings were not the same, their general organization was not dissimilar and certain details struck me as identical. Finally, there was the similarity in paper stock: both copies had been printed on the same special *velin papir*. What I had earlier been offered, I suddenly recognized, had not been a presentation copy at all, but rather Søren Kierkegaard's *personal copy* of the work in question! With a sinking heart I left the library, recalling the months which had passed since I last had seen the book. Had it been sold in the meantime?

It had not. Later that afternoon I bought and carefully carried home what I took to be Søren Kierkegaard's personal copy of "Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand" (1847). Now that I had the book, how could I determine whether it was what I thought it was?

There was first of all the book itself and its earlier described similarity to the luxury copy (*pragtexemplar*) of the "Efterskrift" kept in the Royal Library. But could not further evidence for or against the supposed identity of the book be adduced? I began to think. If the book were indeed Kierkegaard's personal copy, then it should have been among those discovered in his library at his death. I turned to H. P. Rohde's "Om Søren Kierkegaard som Bogsamler",[18]) and there found what I was searching for—a complete listing of those works by Kierkegaard himself found in his library at his death. In this list (Catalogue Numbers 2141-2145) I found five copies of "Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand". Curiously enough, however, these seemed to be ordinary copies, since their descriptions lacked the phrase "*nit. m. Guldsn.*" which characterized the entries of the more elegant copies in the catalogue. A brief trip to the regional archives for Zealand (*Landsarkivet for Sjælland*) in order to examine the auction protocol settled the matter: the prices paid for the five copies of "Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand" were all very low and in keeping with the supposition that they were all ordinary copies. It seemed established then, to my great displeasure, that the copy I had discovered was not among those found in Kierkegaard's library at the time of this death.

But this was an odd state of affairs indeed! For here was a *velin* copy of one of Kierkegaard's own works done up in a binding of the greatest elegance, which yet was absent from his library at his death. What could have happened to it? Had he given it away before his death? If so, then why had he failed to include a dedication to its recipient on the flyleaf as was his custom? Then a thought occurred to me. For if he had given it away with an accompanying letter, then this would explain both its

absence from his library as well as its lack of a dedication. If there were such a letter then it should be found in Thulstrup's edition of "Breve og Aktstykker vedrørende Søren Kierkegaard", and the place to look would be in the period immediately following the publication of the book in early 1847. I looked and quickly came upon Kierkegaard's letter to Henriette cited in the body of the above essay.

Certainly Kierkegaard's description of the book he was sending Henriette could well apply to the book I had discovered and which is pictured on page 115. Its elegance does not belie Kierkegaard's proud description of it. In addition, there was one statement in the letter which indicated to me that the two books were indeed the same. After pointing out that the book he was sending Jette was his own personal copy, Kierkegaard had gone on to remark that it was also "the only suitable copy of the whole edition." I had already made some inquiries and learned that no other luxury copy of "Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand" had ever been known. Thus, if I could establish the fact that the title of the book which Søren sent Jette was indeed "Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand", then I would have a *prima facie* case for the identity of the two volumes. But how could this fact be established?

Here I found myself not without certain resources. For the book he gave her was a gift, and, as H. P. Rohde has pointed out, "When Søren Kierkegaard gave a gift, one could be certain that it was exactly weighed, exactly suited to the situation. . .".[19]) Given Jette Kierkegaard's situation as a chronic invalid, it is not difficult to guess what sort of work Kierkegaard would have deemed appropriate. It would not be one of his aesthetic works such as "Enten-Eller", "Gjentagelsen" ("Repetition"), "Frygt og Bæven" ("Fear and Trembling"), "Forord" ("Prefaces"), or "Stadier paa Livets Vej" ("Stages of Life's Way"). Nor would it be one of his more philosophical treatises such as "Begrebet Angest" ("The Concept of Dread"), "Philosophiske Smuler" ("Philosophical Fragments"), or "Afsluttende uvidenskabelig Efterskrift". No, most probably it would be a work of edification—something which could provide Jette a modicum of comfort in her illness. But what work of edification might it have been? It most probably was not one of the groupings of "edifying discourses" which Kierkegaard published in two's and three's and four's during the early 1840's. By 1847 all of these discourses were some years old, and furthermore it seems doubtful if Kierkegaard ever owned any of them in bindings sufficiently elegant to justify his remarks to Jette. But if we exclude all these, then only two works remain: "Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand" and "Kjerlighedens Gjerninger"

("Works of Love"). Both were published in 1847, and both are works of edification.

Of the two works "Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand" would have been the more appropriate to Jette's predicament. The last section is entitled "The Gospel of Suffering" and thus would have direct relevance to Jette's situation as an invalid and "sufferer". As we saw above, in another letter from the same year Kierkegaard discourses at length with her on the theme of suffering and her relation to it—it seems then only natural that he would have picked a book dealing with this theme as a meaningful gift for her. But both of these works are indeed works of edification, and on the basis of their content alone it is impossible to rule out one or the other as a possible choice. It is fortunate, then, that independent evidence offers us a firmer basis for choosing between the two. I refer here to certain facts concerning the dating of the letter.

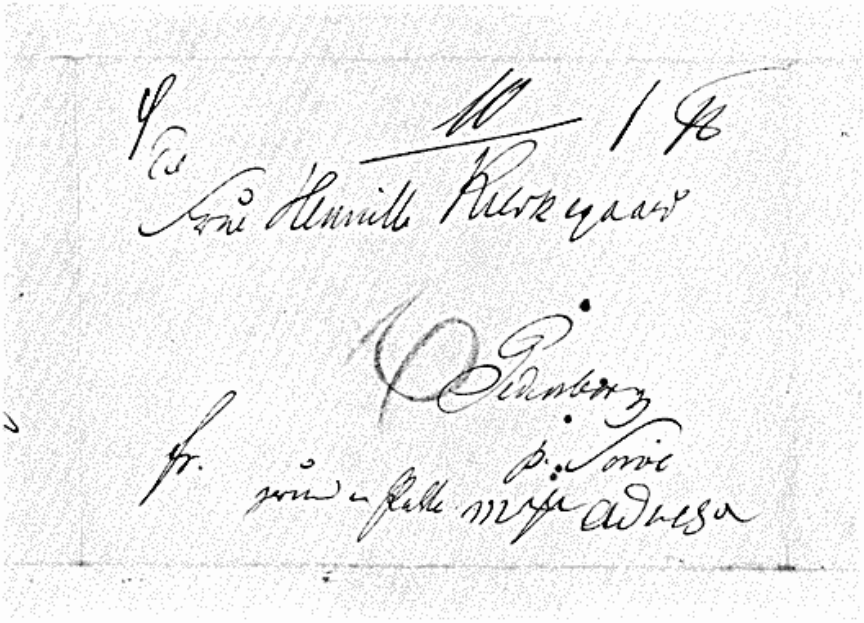
From its content it is quite obvious that it was written just after Søren returned from a visit with Jette and Peter. Moreover, as has been mentioned above we know from Coachman Lassen's receipts that Søren made three visits to Sorø in 1847—on April 29th, June 14th, and October 11th respectively. These dates are important since the first two fall *after* the publication of "Opbyggelige Taler i forskjellig Aand" and *before* the publication of "Kjerlighedens Gjerninger". If it could be definitely established that the letter was written just after either one of the first two visits, then this would rule out "Kjerlighedens Gjerninger" as a possibility. I believe this can be done.

In the third paragraph of his letter Søren remarks to Jette: "I hope that this little note by means of which I say goodbye will find you as well as I found you on my arrival." We know independently from Peter Kierkegaard's diary that Jette took to her bed in the latter part of August 1847, and that she was still ill on October 21st.[20]) It seems unlikely that Søren would have commented on Jette's good health under these circumstances. In addition we know from Henriette Lund's reminiscences that Jette was still in relatively good health at the time of Søren's visit in June.[21]) In light of all these facts it seems unlikely in the extreme that the letter dates from a time later than July 1847. Such a date would rule out "Kjerlighedens Gjerninger" as a possibility, since it was not published until September 29, 1847.

The net result of this complicated web of inference is to establish the *probability* that the book described by Kierkegaard and the book pictured on page 115 are indeed the same volume. Up to now not a single piece of *direct* evidence has been produced to link the two volumes. Let

me conclude by citing the single piece of direct evidence which links the volumes. On the basis of all this evidence both direct and indirect, the reader is then invited to make up his own mind about the identity of this strange book which has tantalized me these many months.

Now the single piece of direct evidence. On the outside of Søren's letter to Jette we find the following *udskrift*:



Til
Frue Henriette Kierkegaard
Pedersborg
fr[anco]. p. Soroe
Hermed en Pakke mrk. Adressen

(For Mrs. Henriette Kierkegaard, Pedersborg near Soroe. Postage paid. With one addressed package.)

In the right-hand corner—just above the word "Kierkegaard"—one can make out the postal mark for one Danish pound (500 g.), a mark which undoubtedly stands for the total weight of the package. Unwrapped, the book pictured in Figure Four weighs 467 grams!

NOTES

(1) Henriette Lund, Erindringer fra Hjemmet, (1909), p. 111. – (2) Letter from Grundtvig to Poul Egede Glahn, 23 December 1820. Printed in Glahn-Samfundet, III, 1935-39, p. 93. – (3) Both poems can be found in Glahn-Samfundet, III, pp. 135-137. (4) Henriette Lund, op. cit., pp. 111-112. This passage is translated in T. H. Croxall's, Glimpses and Impressions of Kierkegaard, (London 1959), p. 61. – (5) Letter from Søren Kierkegaard to Peter Christian Kierkegaard, 16 May 1844. Printed in Breve og Aktstykker vedrørende Søren Kierkegaard, (1953-54), I, pp. 134-135. – (6) Either/Or, Translated by D. F. Swenson, L. M. Swenson and W. Lowrie, (Garden City 1959), II, p. 329. – (7) Printed in Breve og Aktstykker vedrørende Søren Kierkegaard, I, pp. 137-138. – (8) See Af Søren Kierkegaards Efterladte Papirer, III, (1877), pp. 872-873. – (9) Søren Kierkegaards Papirer, VII, 1 (1915) A 88. – (10) Henriette Lund, op. cit., pp. 145-146; see also Croxall, op. cit., p. 66.

(11) Printed in Breve og Aktstykker vedrørende Søren Kierkegaard, I pp. 168-170. (12) Carl Weltzer, Peter og Søren Kierkegaard, (1936), p. 210. – (13) Letter from Søren Kierkegaard to Peter Christian Kierkegaard, 18 February 1843. The term Kierkegaard uses is „Nervesvage". Printed in Breve og Aktstykker vedrørende Søren Kierkegaard, I, pp. 115-116. – (14) Letter from Andrea Brendenberg Glahn to Otto Glahn, July 1841. See Glahn-Samfundet, V, (1952-58), p. 87. – (15) Printed in Breve og Aktstykker vedrørende Søren Kierkegaard, I, pp. 179-181. – (16) Printed in Breve og Aktstykker vedrørende Søren Kierkegaard, I, pp. 186-187. – (17) See Weltzer, op. cit., p. 231, and Kierkegaard Arkivet, Gruppe D, Pakke 8, Læg 13: Receipts from P. S. Lassen to S. A. Kierkegaard for a 3 day trip to Sorø beginning 10 June 1850. (18) H. P. Rohde, Om Søren Kierkegaard som bogsamler, studier i hans efterladte papirer paa Det kongelige Bibliotek. Printed in Fund og Forskning, VIII (1961), pp. 79-127. – (19) Ibid., p. 82. – (20) See Weltzer, op. cit., p. 210. – (21) Henriette Lund, op. cit., p. 145.